



Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
Phone 406-542-5500

February 27, 2020

Dear Interested Citizen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is working with the Bitter Root Land Trust to purchase approximately 97 acres of private land along the West Fork of the Bitterroot River in Ravalli County, for creation of the C. Ben White Memorial Fishing Access Site (FAS). The proposed FAS would be owned and managed by FWP and would expand the currently leased 1.5-acre W. W. White Memorial FAS and permanently protect public access and recreation, as well as fish and wildlife values at the gateway of the West Fork canyon. Approximately ½ mile of the West Fork flows through the property, with an additional ½ mile of side channels. The riparian habitat includes mixed cottonwood and ponderosa pine riparian forest, willow thickets, gravel bars, and river channel. The upland portion of the property is approximately 19 acres of open, large-diameter ponderosa pine forest connected to Bitterroot National Forest lands. The FAS would encompass a variety of aquatic and terrestrial habitats that provide resources for a wide range of fish and wildlife species.

Proposed developments for the C. Ben White Memorial FAS include expanded day-use improvements, a small campground with 1-3 sites, river-bottom and upland parking areas, 2 vault latrines, and walking trails. The existing boat-launch area would mostly remain the same with possible minor improvements. Fishing, hunting, and wildlife-watching opportunities would increase, as well as opportunity for horseback riding on established trails. The project is proposed to be funded by the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust, FWP's Fishing Access Site and Access Public Lands programs, and other public and private donors, including donated value from the current private landowners.

Enclosed you will find for your review the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) describing and analyzing this proposal. The EA may also be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP at the address above; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing shrose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's Internet webpage <http://fwp.mt.gov/default.html> ("News," then "Recent Public Notices").

Comments may be made on FWP's website (webpage above) or may be directed to Sharon Rose at the mail or email addresses above. Comments must be received by FWP no later than March 27, 2020.

As part of the decision-making process under MEPA, I expect to issue the Decision Notice for this EA soon after the end of the comment period. The Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission has the final decision-making authority for FWP land acquisition proposals, and we expect to ask the Commission to render its decision on this proposal at its meeting in June 2020. (Please check the "Commission" link on FWP's webpage for the June 2020 meeting date and location; an agenda will be posted online 1-2 weeks prior to the meeting.) Approval would also be necessary from the Montana Board of Land Commissioners, potentially at its July 2020 meeting (webpage <http://dnrc.mt.gov/landboard>).

Sincerely,

Randy Arnold
Regional Supervisor

RA/sr